

Testimony of

Ms. Helen Bandley Houghton

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Helen Bandley Houghton, and I am a Downwinder! I grew up in South-Central Utah in the community of Richfield, in Sevier County. I lived in Richfield from 1946 to 1970, leaving the valley to attend college and to obtain my teaching degree. While growing up in the 50's and 60's we lived a life that would be described as rural. There was one, maybe two fast-food establishments in the community, and families did not eat out on a nightly basis.

As a child, I worked in the garden, ate fresh vegetables, drank milk fresh from the cow, and spent hours in the city swimming pool. We would sit on the porch and watch the clouds from the testing site in Nevada as they dissipated over our mountains and streams. Living on Highway 89, the Big Rock Candy Mountain, Zion Canyon, and Bryce Canyon were the destinations for family rides on Sunday afternoon. We did not know of the damage that was being done to our bodies at this time.

For 3 months each year of high school, I would spend mornings at the city pool, teaching the children how to swim. Needless to say, the other girl that spent those summers with me, has also had cancer. (She had Breast Cancer) I had Colon Cancer. This was identified when I was 35 years old, and my Doctor did nothing except remove the tumors, because I was just too young to have colon cancer, and I did not fit the profile. Needless to say this disease returned 5 years and 17 days later, and I was lucky enough to have changed school districts and obtain Cancer Insurance. My life as I knew it was now over.

I could not continue on with my PhD in Education, because I was unable to sit in class. I could not mow the lawn, attend aerobics classes, and remember a great deal of information. Being in education this was a problem. I had to leave the job that I had because I could no longer be under stress, nor could I count on not having problems with my colostomy. (It can take up to 5 years to get it working on a reasonable basis.) I moved back to 2nd grade, and have had to gradually work back in to curriculum and staff development. I lost 18 years of my dream because of this disease that I did nothing to deserve, except be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I was now unable to change school districts, because of the health insurance issues; no one would cover me because of pre-existing conditions. I could not get insurance on my house, because I was considered a high risk, and I could no longer care for my two daughters without a great deal of help from family, who had come to Texas to help. I was unable to go to Utah to live, and I had to stay close to doctors who for the next 10 years were my best friends.

I cannot comprehend that the government that I cherish has decided to put an unequal value on my medical problems. The trucker, the miner, the ground worker at the blast site knew what they were doing, and the risks that they were taking when they went to this project. The citizens of Southern Utah were told that there would be no risk.

My mother died a very painful death from cancer; I have had 18 years of waiting for the other shoe to drop, and to be told that my cancer had returned. I have been unable to retire from teaching after 37 years, because I must have insurance, and I cannot get Medicare or Medicaid until I am now 65 or 67 years old. It was not unusual for my medical bills to be \$400.00 a month

in addition to my co-pay. There are times when I have to argue with my insurance company for the tests that the specialists need to do if they are more than once a year, and this has happened several times. My 54 year old brother is now in a Hospice Home in Orem, Utah, waiting to die. They have lost their home, their credit, their future. His medical bills have been over \$10,000.00 a month, because his insurance would not pay for the shots that he needed to continue the chemo treatment. Richard has been off work for 8 months, and he has been bed-ridden for the past 6 months. They have lost everything they had. His widow must now find a job at the age of 54 that will provide insurance and a living wage. She has been out of the job market for several years. Senators, my medical bills and expenses are just as great as those who drove the trucks of ore through our communities. My cancer is just as real as theirs. I cannot understand why the government would decide that some people would get \$175,000 plus life time medical benefits, and the others would not only lose 2 and 3 members in a family, but their homes, and leave their families with medical bills that seem insurmountable. I am asking you to please equalize these benefits so our legacy will not be one of despair and poverty.

Cancer is an expensive illness. You never get better, you go into remission for a period of time, or you die. Once you have disease, you are simply waiting for the tests to come back positive. I would like to know that my mother and brother have not died in vain. The information that was gained from these tests is critical to our world as we now know it. The people need to be treated fairly and equally when it comes to this illness. The cost of this disease has tripled over the past few years. Please provide us the same monies for the people of Southern Utah as you have the workers.